

California State Parks & The Great Central Valley

"Few of them realized, for example, that, in the San Joaquin Valley and the Sacramento Delta, they gazed upon lands of almost fabulous fertility, lands that, in truth, can only be compared with those of the Nile Valley, and the other great river-valley gardens of the world."

— Carey McWilliams, 1935



April 2004



Director's Message

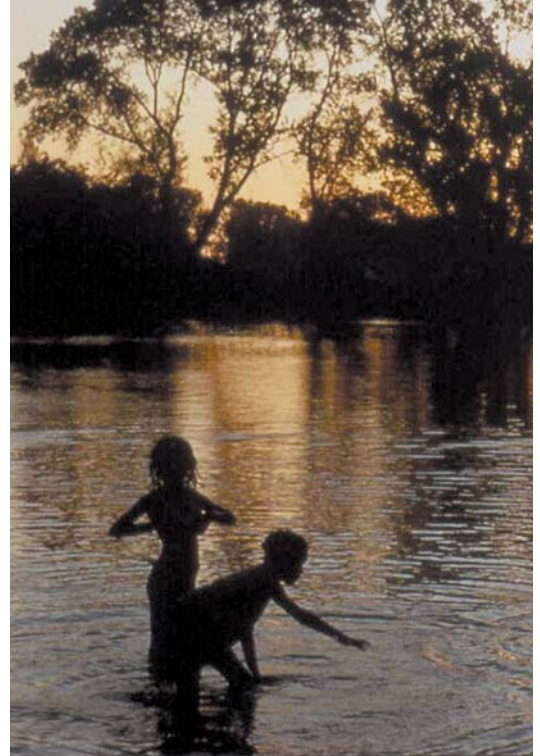
California's Great Central Valley is changing in dramatic ways—in its unprecedented growth, in its evolving economies, and in the diversity, needs and interests of its residents.

Ruth Coleman, Director

To respond to these dynamic changes, to increase visibility and service to Valley residents and visitors, and because as an ecological region the Valley supports the least amount of publicly protected areas, I initiated a study in July 2003 to develop a roadmap for the State Park System's future role in the Central Valley.

This study will help guide future State Park System acquisition and development projects, and can assist the Legislature in crafting future funding programs that will benefit California's "heartland."

Ruth Coleman



"In a time when many seem to want to pave the world, our state parks preserve not only breathing spaces for the earth, but islands of communion: 'When you step into the stream,' an old vaquero said to me on the banks of the Kern River many years ago, 'you're in there with your ancestors and mine.'"

It baffled me then, but now I understand. Preserving places where my grandchildren might experience a setting just as their great-great grandparents did as immigrants to this state in the 1850s is spiritually as well as historically relevant. The old live within the young, just as the old California manages to hang on in the present."

— Gerald Haslam, Author



Acquistion and Development Strategies



Recommendations from Valley residents and State Parks planners led to the development of Valley-specific strategies for both acquisition of new properties and expansion and development of existing state parks. Factors to be considered in acquisition and development projects should focus on lands with these characteristics:

- Lands containing under-represented natural or historical resources
- Lands with water features to support a multitude of uses and interests
- River corridors and parkways
- Lands that have the capacity for high demand recreational activities such as camping, day use, trails and youth activities
- Lands that link large blocks of protected habitat resulting in sustainable combined acreage
- Lands that serve growing communities and a diversity of interests
- Lands that offer the possibility of partnerships with other organizations





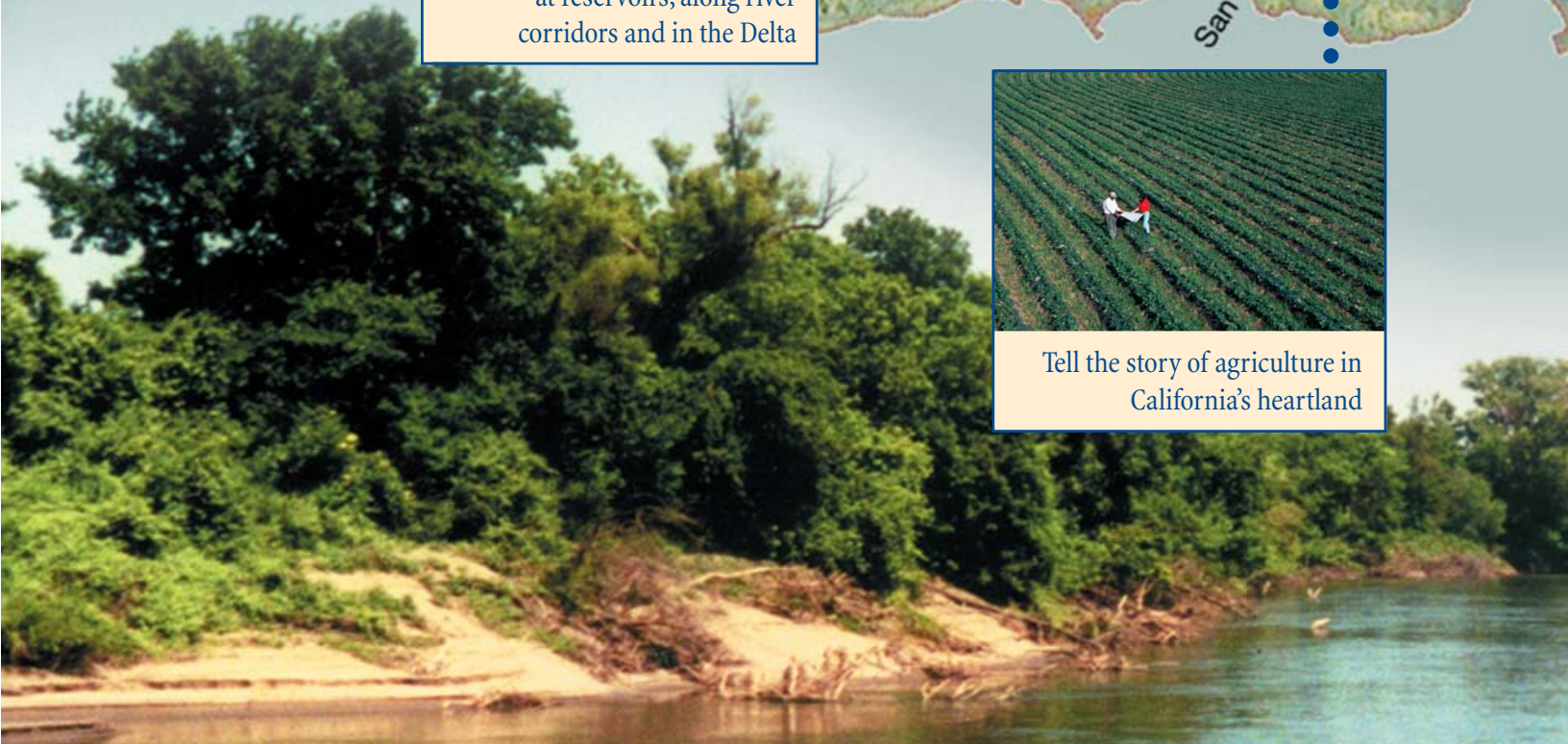
Focus on linear river corridors
—Sacramento, San Joaquin,
Stanislaus, Tuolumne, Merced



Expand recreation opportunities
at reservoirs, along river
corridors and in the Delta



Tell the story of agriculture in
California's heartland



There are many opportunities for California State Parks to increase its presence and service to the public throughout the Valley. Here are a few examples of how these goals can be achieved:



Protect natural resources—
oak woodlands, riparian
habitats, native grasslands



Discover the history and romance
of Highway 99



Recognize the contributions
of the Valley's immigrants



Learn from California's
native people



THE VALLEY'S 32 STATE PARK UNITS
FROM NORTH TO SOUTH ARE:

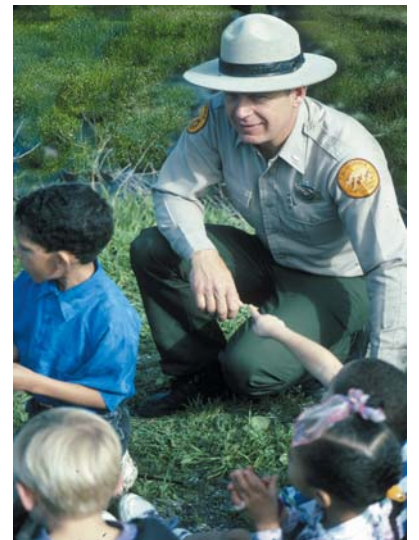
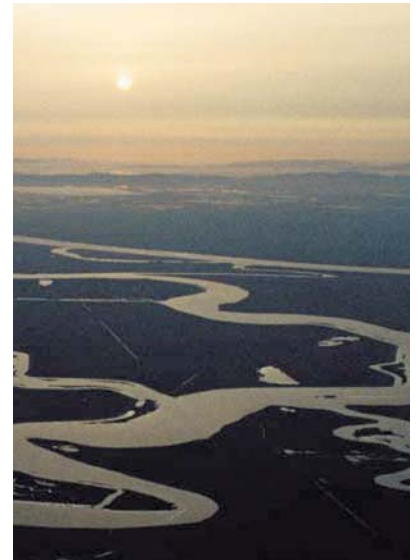
William B. Ide Adobe SHP
Woodson Bridge SRA
Bidwell-Sacramento River SP
Bidwell Mansion SHP
Lake Oroville SRA
Clay Pit SVRA
Colusa-Sacramento River SRA
Sutter Buttes
Woodland Opera House SHP
Folsom Lake SRA
Folsom Powerhouse SHP
State Capitol Museum
Sutter's Fort SHP/State Indian Museum
Governor's Mansion SHP
Old Sacramento SHP/Railroad Museum
Leland Stanford Mansion SHP
Prairie City SVRA
Stone Lake
Delta Meadows River Park
Brannan Island SRA
Franks Tract SRA
Bethany Reservoir SRA
Caswell Memorial SRA
San Luis Reservoir SRA
Pacheco SP
George J. Hatfield SRA
Great Valley Grasslands SP
McConnell SRA

Turlock Lake SRA
Millerton Lake SRA
Colonel Allensworth SHP
Tule Elk SR



California State Parks in the Central Valley

California State Parks manages 32 parks in the Central Valley, ranging from William B. Ide Adobe State Historic Park in Tehama County to Tule Elk State Reserve in Kern County.



"People, resources and policies invested in planning for the future will be the critical elements for the well-being of the Central Valley."

— Carol Whiteside, President
The Great Valley Center

Project Summary

Our study concludes that the State Park System can better serve the needs of Central Valley residents and visitors through a conscientious program of protecting lands and developing facilities at new and existing units. The study recommends the following:

- Expanding recreational facilities for camping, day use, fishing, boating, and trails to accommodate larger families and groups in existing parks along river corridors, at Valley reservoirs and in the Delta.
- Expanding landholdings at existing parks and acquiring new parklands along major river corridors such as the Sacramento, Tuolumne, Stanislaus, San Joaquin and Merced Rivers, particularly where an opportunity exists to link state parks and other lands in public ownership.
- Acquiring lands that preserve and protect vanishing natural resources once more abundantly evident in the Central Valley, such as blue oak and sycamore woodlands, and native grasslands.
- Better preserving and interpreting the rich history associated with the Valley's past, including the full sweep of agricultural history; Native American past and continuing life ways; Highway 99; the Valley's oil industry; and the stories of immigrant workers from around the world; of Depression-era dust bowl refugees; and of California's country and western music artists.



Defining the Central Valley



For purposes of this study, the Central Valley is geographically defined by the mountains surrounding it, extending approximately from Redding in the north to the Tehachapi Mountains in the south, and from the valley floor up to approximately 2,000 feet in elevation along the Coast Range and along the Sierra Nevada. Collectively these 18 counties are home to 17 percent of the state's population. Although this elongated basin is not very wide, it accounts for 15 million acres or 15 percent of California's total acreage.

Central Valley residents have a multitude of park and recreation opportunities available both in the Valley and in the foothills nearby. Federal, state, and local parks, historic sites, museums, and open space areas provide opportunities for short day excursions as well as vacation destinations.

The Valley's natural resources are both diverse and unique; some plant assemblages and animal populations are found in the Valley and nowhere else.

Numerous historic and cultural opportunities are present in the Valley. Ranging from the discovery of gold in the foothills to the growth of agriculture in the Valley, from the stories of succeeding waves of immigrants to the romance of Highway 99, from the mysteries of prehistoric rock art sites to the story of the railroads, the Valley's cultural heritage is rich and varied.



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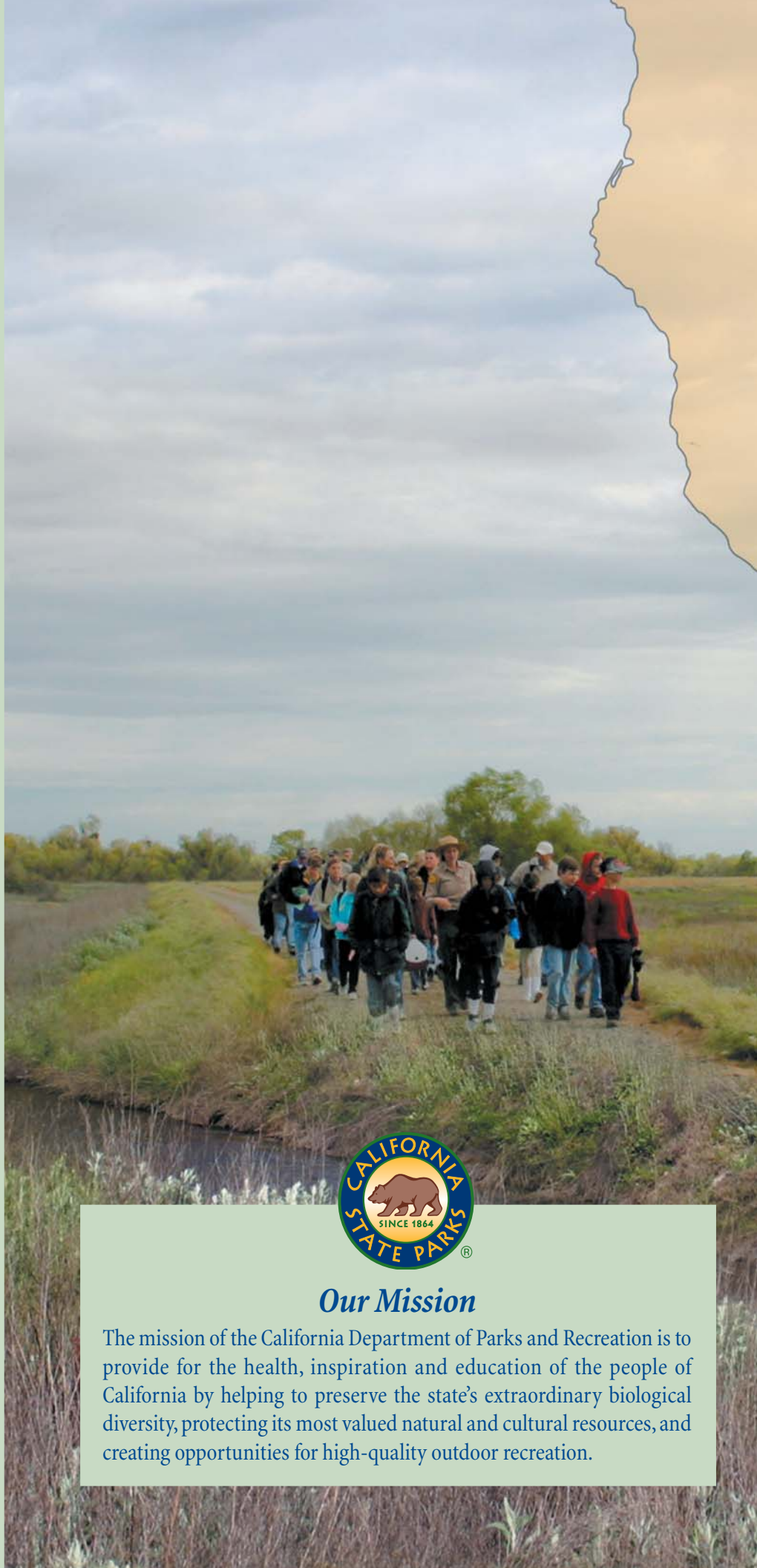


Photos provided by: The Great Valley Center, Estelle Boro and the San Joaquin River Parkway and Conservation Trust, the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service and the City of Oakland, Department of Parks and Recreation.

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Sacramento, CA
94296-0001

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916-653-6995, outside the U.S.
711, TTY relay service
www.parks.ca.gov



Our Mission

The mission of the California Department of Parks and Recreation is to provide for the health, inspiration and education of the people of California by helping to preserve the state's extraordinary biological diversity, protecting its most valued natural and cultural resources, and creating opportunities for high-quality outdoor recreation.